

European Marine Board

# Response to the external review report

2010 - 2019

## Background

The European Marine Board agreed to commission a review in October 2018 at the Trieste Plenary meeting. The Board was delighted that Wendy Watson-Wright from the Oceans Frontiers Institute in Canada (formerly IOC-UNESCO chair) agreed to chair the panel, and that Mark Dickey-Colas (ICES), Jacky Wood (former JPI Oceans), Ned Dwyer (former EurOceans) and Willie Wilson (MBA) agreed to conduct this review and produce a report with recommendations during June 2019. The Board thanks the External Review team for giving up their time to conduct this review and for subsequently providing clear and concise recommendations. The findings were initially presented and discussed by the review team at the EMB Spring Plenary meeting in Paris on Thursday 13 June 2019 after which the EMB Executive Committee (ExCom) evaluated the initial results at their meeting of 14 June 2019. The full report was sent to ExCom and the EMB Secretariat on 26 June 2019. While the review is final and its findings fixed, the Board hereby provides a formal response, outlining the Board's position on the review findings, and providing an action plan on how we will address these findings.

## General comments on the review findings

The EMB welcomes the general conclusions and recommendations as presented in the Review report. In particular, the Board is encouraged by the overall conclusion that *“the EMB is a highly respected organisation for marine science policy advice that is effectively fulfilling a very important role. The Panel's review is very positive overall”*. The review team noted that the EMB is seen as an authoritative voice of marine science and widely regarded as a trusted organisation with a clear role in providing strong foresight on the research needs for marine science. The EMB, therefore, fills a well-defined niche in the marine science research-policy interface and can successfully influence the European and national Research Agendas across the broad field of marine science. This analysis reconfirms that EMB is still fulfilling its mission to be *“the leading European think tank in marine science policy and providing a platform to advance marine research and to bridge the gap between science and policy”*.

However, the External Review stated that *“there are concerns that the EMB does **not appear** to be preparing adequately for what is foreseen to be an increased future role in providing foresight for society”*. The word “appear” was stressed by the review team, as they found that even though EMB is forward looking, this is not always obvious outside its membership. The EMB provides long-term foresight for marine science through its Navigating the Future publications. Measures and procedures are in place to respond to long-term trends, upcoming science needs and societal issues, and these are discussed during the EMB Plenary and ExCom meetings. These are, however, internal mechanisms, which are seldom communicated outside the EMB Membership. The EMB procedures allow for a high degree of flexibility to enable quick responses to emerging topics within the marine science-policy interface. The EMB's long-term strategic agenda should reflect this flexibility.

## Comments on the general recommendations:

The general recommendations of the review include the following:

- A. Prepare a strategic framework to ensure resilience to future challenges as well as long term sustainability of the organisation

*The review team recommend that this strategic framework should address 5 key areas:*

- *Remain relevant;*
- *Maintain products of the highest quality;*
- *Ensure decision making processes are equitable, transparent, and trusted;*
- *Disseminate outputs through relevant up to date tools that can handle enhanced electronic interactions and online inputs;*

- *Enhance the engagement of its membership in activities and in promoting awareness of EMB and its remit.*

The items raised above are well understood by the Board, and we confirm that most of these items are already incorporated either in the EMB Internal Guidelines, or as discussion items at EMB Plenary and ExCom meetings. However, these areas are often approached as separate issues, which are seldom communicated outside the EMB membership. We believe that the internal nature of our discussions might cause a perceived lack of clarity on EMB's long-term vision. Efforts will be made to clarify and better communicate EMB's long term vision and strategy, e.g. by outlining EMB's vision at the first paragraph of each report and publication. Concrete actions for this will be included in the action plan.

The Board recognises that the 5 areas mentioned above are inter-linked. EMB can only remain relevant if it continues to provide products of the highest quality, delivered through recognized and trusted procedures, which are clear to- and validated by wider stakeholders. The quality of EMB's outputs relies on the engagement of its members and their nominated experts to provide the state-of-the-art expertise. Engaging with EMB Working Groups and activities takes time and resources from the experts (e.g. to write documents, attend Working Group meetings, launch events and other dissemination events). Therefore, it is crucial to have a high engagement rate from the EMB Member organisations. In return, engagement in- and contribution to EMB outputs and activities are valuable for members, as a means to generate impact and visibility for their work on a European and International level.

EMB has relied heavily on communication through printed publications, but has recently expanded to use social media and more visual media. The Board does however note the recommendation to explore up to date tools and communication methods to enhance interaction and output and will seek to expand its communication tools. This will be done in cooperation with the EMBCP and the EMB Young Ambassadors to ensure relevance and reach to the future generation.

B. [Develop a multi-year business plan](#)

*The business plan should be set up to capture financial fluctuations, and a risk assessment that factors in weaknesses & threats as well as opportunistic activity to keep EMB innovative.*

At present, the Board discusses its multi-annual (5-year) budget forecast at an EMB Plenary meeting every 2 years. This budget contains both the expected income from EMB membership contributions and other sources (e.g. EU projects), and the planned activities and publications for the coming years. The EMB expenditure consists mostly of staff costs of the EMB Secretariat (ca. 70% of total expenditures), and turnover in staff-members causes immediate and visible fluctuations in the budget, which is hard to predict and control. The remaining 30% of expenditures are mainly influenced by EMB activities (events and publications) which are planned fairly well in advance (1-3 years) by the ExCom. ExCom acts as the Trustees (Directors) of EMB, and have the legal responsibilities associated with that role, including the financial management and assessment of risk for the Board. Through decisions made by the Excom, EMB has set up a reserve fund as a contingency plan for unforeseen expenditures or drops in income (e.g. due to delayed payments of membership fees or membership withdrawal). Risk assessments were introduced and included in the Internal Guidelines in 2018. The risk analysis is primarily discussed at ExCom level, who held a first risk assessment evaluation in 2018.

In addition, the EMB has drafted a membership strategy, which looks at opportunities to sustain and potentially expand the EMB membership. The membership strategy is first focused on the strategic importance of EMB, and second on the financial impact. This strategy takes into account threats and opportunities for the EMB, and aims to ensure a balance in membership both geographically and between member types.

One of the suggestions that came out of the initial risk analysis was to establish the EMB Young Ambassador Programme. The ExCom members identified the lack of engagement with early career scientists as a weakness, and launched the Ambassador programme as remediation. The young Ambassador Programme was set up in April 2019 and will be evaluated in Spring 2020 for its added value and efficacy.

**Conclusion:** The Board covers the multi-year financial and strategic analysis within its existing its membership strategy, its risk-analysis, and its multi-annual budget projection. However, these three items could be more formalized and could be integrated into a single document. This will be prepared by the EMB Secretariat for discussion at the Spring 2020 Plenary meeting.

## Comments on the specific recommendations

The panel recommends that the EMB:

1. Document the procedures and rationale for selecting topics for EMB activities

*In order to maintain credibility and protect its legitimacy as a respected science-policy advisor, the European Marine Board should document publicly the stepwise process for the selection of areas, and this should include the rationale for the selections. The European Marine Board should formalise the process for scrutiny, in other words professionalise the documentation of the process.*

The EMB has strict procedures for the selection of topics and experts for EMB activities, and for the review process of its publications. The rationale for a proposed topic is initially discussed at Board level in plenary meetings, and then further elaborated in the Terms of Reference drafted for each EMB Working Group. The Terms of Reference are developed by the topic champion and the EMB Secretariat. However, these procedures and the Terms of Reference are not made publicly available, leading to a lack of transparency.

**Conclusion:** The EMB Secretariat will make the decision-making procedure public in an open and concise manner. The Terms of Reference for each Working Group will be made available on the EMB website following approval. The Board will also consider the possibility of making our call for experts public.

2. Build links with applied science users in Europe, for example with the Regional Seas Conventions

The Board agrees that this is a valuable recommendation and will follow up on this suggestion and will increase efforts to reach out to both the applied science users and industry where appropriate. For instance, the Regional Seas Conventions are part of the EOOS (European Ocean Observation System) governance structure through the EOOS Advisory Committee that EMB co-Chairs. The Secretariat relies heavily on the national- and regional-level links and networks of our Members to establish effective communication pathways.

3. Consider mechanisms to increase sustainability regarding EMB Membership

*These could include the expansion of in-country membership, increasing income from participation of university consortia, marketing EMB membership to universities strong in marine research/training (or encouraging and/or targeting new consortia), finding*

*mechanisms to include small institutes with only a few people and participation from outside Europe. Efforts should continue to ensure existing membership is maintained and that the 'transition period' to formalising membership of the IVWZ is minimised.*

As stated in B above the EMB has a documented membership strategy that includes a list of countries/organisations to target for EMB membership applications. Opening EMB membership to other organisations has been extensively discussed at the Autumn 2018 and Spring 2019 EMB Plenary meetings. In addition, an extensive checklist to evaluate new membership applications was approved and will be added to the EMB Internal Guidelines. At the Spring 2019 Plenary, the Board agreed to increase membership from 3 to 4 members per country. Membership applications are considered from research performing organizations, research funders and consortia of nationally representative marine universities, and a balance of members is always sought. The limit will be modified in the EMB Articles of Association, to be published in the Belgian Gazette by the end of 2019. This will enable the expansion of in-country membership as proposed here.

The transformation from the European Science Foundation (ESF) to the international non-profit organisation under Belgian Law (IVZW) is nearly completed, with 30 members currently signed up. Only 3 of the initial 33 members still have to modify their membership to the new EMB IVZW, and the EMB Secretariat is in contact with these organisations to follow up on their transition procedure and ensure this is completed in a timely manner.

While individuals from smaller institutes and from outside Europe are able to participate in EMB working group activities and events (if selected through the appropriate procedures), it is not the intention of EMB to expand its membership to include these organizations within its membership. The EMB Articles of Association state that members must be from countries within the Council of Europe, and must be an institute or consortium that is representative of national-level marine science activity. This, along with the membership fee levels, precludes any small institution or organizations from outside Europe joining. Other organizations within the European marine science landscape already fulfil these roles.

4. [Inquire plenary meetings and lack of gender balance of the ExCom should be seen as concerns and need to be addressed](#)

The Board is very aware of these issues and takes note of this recommendation. In order to improve attendance to EMB Plenary meetings, the Secretariat will look into ways to make the Board meetings more interesting and engaging for EMB members, e.g. by reformatting the Board meetings, setting up discussion groups, engaging with national activities, demonstrating value of membership, etc. In addition, the Secretariat works with our partner organisations to minimise overlap when multiple meetings could mean a lack of quorum for our meetings.

Several steps were taken in 2018 to increase the number of women amongst the EMB Delegates and to broaden the pool of women eligible for ExCom positions. An amendment to the Internal Guidelines now asks members to consider the gender balance in the nomination of their Delegate and Alternate to EMB. The Board also agreed to allow EMB Alternates to be able to also run for ExCom in order to increase the number of women that can be elected to ExCom. However, nominations for ExCom have to come from the members, and the nominated person needs to be willing and able to allocate time for this additional role. The Board acknowledges that with our current membership, gender balance at ExCom level will be impossible without gender-equal nominations.

The EMB also strives to achieve a gender balance for working groups, panels and presentations at EMB organised events, and we are often able to achieve a more equal gender balance during these events and in our working groups.

5. [Special attention should be given to communicating the differentiation between EMB and other Membership organisations and project consortia](#)

The Board acknowledges the difficulty in understanding the full extent of the marine science-policy landscape in Europe, all the players and their roles. Several organisational diagrams exist to explain the differences and the links between the relevant organisations, networks and projects. The EMB Secretariat has made some attempt to capture these differences and will highlight the differentiation in its communication.

6. [The EMB Wikipedia page, which still refers to ESF, should be updated](#)

The EMB Secretariat will modify the Wikipedia webpage before the end of summer 2019.

7. [Consider mechanisms to allow less affluent countries to join, hence increasing the geographic coverage of members](#)

The Board refers to the explanation provided under recommendations 2 and 5. EMB membership fees are determined by a countries' GDP and hence less affluent countries are already taken into consideration in this way. The Board is always keen to ensure wide geographical coverage and using its membership strategy, will continue to explore ways to demonstrate its value added for new members and hence to bring members from new countries on board.

8. [Make more active use of the EMB Communication Panel to underpin dissemination of all its products and support implementation of emerging and novel communication approaches](#)

The Board will adopt this recommendation. A perfect example of an excellent collaboration with the EMBCP Panel was set by the launch of EMB's latest publication [Navigating the Future V](#) at the [EurOCEAN 2019](#) event organised in Paris on 11-12 June 2019. The EMBCP helped to coordinate the press-release, organised interviews with the local media and created a short video that is available online. Given the successful outcome of this collaboration, the EMBCP will be asked to be more involved in future publications. The EMBCP is invited to the 2019 Autumn Plenary meeting where future potential collaboration and activities will be discussed further.

9. [A comprehensive risk register should be completed and regularly reviewed by Trustees/Board](#)

The Board will ask ExCom to complete the risk register and update it annually, after which it will be presented to and discussed by the Board at an EMB Plenary meeting.

10. [Human Resources and Health and Safety reviews should be undertaken and any shortcomings addressed](#)

EMB relies on an external HR and H&S Secretariat to address these tasks. This Secretariat gives regular updates on new legal requirements regarding HR and H&S issues to the Board, and ensure that the EMB Secretariat fulfils all the legal obligations. The Secretariat also conducts an external H&S review every 2 years and the EMB staff members conduct an annual Performance Management meeting with the EMB Executive Director where HR and H&S issues are discussed. All relevant HR matters for the EMB Secretariat are detailed in the labour regulations which are submitted to both the Social Secretariat and the Federal Public Service for Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue in Belgium.

11. Links with capacity building organisations around policy/UNCLOS (e.g. International Ocean Institute, World Maritime University) should be improved

The Board agrees links with capacity building organizations are important and we make use of these links where appropriate through our working groups and events. This is a valuable recommendation and will endeavour to improve links where possible.

## Response to perceived threats and weaknesses

One of the recommendations is to “*continue to improve dialogue with the European Commission DGs, (e.g., organise more participative workshops; interact with a broader range of DGs)*”. Conversely, the review saw “*the perceived lack of independence from the European Commission*” as a weakness and threat. The EMB’s mission is to conduct state-of-the-art analyses and translate these into clear policy recommendations to European and national institutions. It is therefore crucial that EMB is in close contact with the European Commission, e.g. by inviting them to EMB meetings, attending European Commission events, and maintain dialogue to stay up to date on areas where the marine research community can provide answers to policy relevant questions and or influence European policy making. This is necessary to stay relevant at the European level, and to fulfil the founding mission of the EMB.

**However, the EMB’s actions, decisions and outputs are solely driven by the views and needs of its members.** In order to combat misconceptions about the independence of the EMB from the European Commission, the EMB will publicly clarify its relationship with the European Commission and its participation in open calls for EU projects on its website in order to maintain our credibility as an independent organisation.

In response to the recommendations formulated by the external review team, the Board has agreed on an action plan to address these recommendations. The recommendation-specific actions highlighted above are translated in a concrete action plan below that will be implemented throughout the period 2019-2020. The Board will have an internal evaluation of the effectiveness of the actions undertaken in the period 2021-2022.

## Suggested Action Plan

In order to address the recommendations and the weaknesses identified by the review team, the Board has agreed to work on the following action points within the indicated timelines:

1. Clarify and communicate EMB’s strategic framework on how we ensure resilience to future challenges and our long-term sustainability, e.g. by including a paragraph on the EMB long term vision in each report or publication. *[EMB Spring Plenary 2020]*
2. Integrated our financial forecasts with the membership strategy and the risk-analysis into a more concise business plan. *[EMB Spring Plenary 2020]*
3. Increase transparency of EMB’s decision-making procedures (regarding working groups, activities and other procedures) by providing concise and clear information on the EMB website. *[October 2019]*
4. Publish the approved Terms of Reference for new EMB Working Groups on the EMB website in order to provide the rationale behind the activity. *[as from September 2019]*
5. Evaluate the possibility of making calls for experts for EMB working groups public in the Autumn 2019 Plenary meeting. *[EMB Autumn Plenary 2019]*

6. Publicly clarify the relationship and role of EMB within the wider marine science-policy landscape vis-à-vis other networks in the field through consensus with other networks. *[Mid 2020]*
7. Publicly clarify the relation to the European Commission, including EMB's participation in EU projects and open calls. *[EMB Autumn Plenary 2019]*
8. Continue to improve dialogue with the wide range of European Commission DGs via participative workshops (e.g. the EMB Brown Bag Lunches, Parliament events, etc.). *[Ongoing]*
9. Bring the gender imbalance more under the attention (e.g. by organising a special session or publication) and stimulate EMB Members to appoint at least one female EMB Delegates or Alternate, and promote and actively seek gender balance for EMB ExCom nominations, for the selection of working group members, and invited speakers and panellist for EMB events.
10. Enhance EMB member's engagement and participation in EMB activities by looking into ways to make EMB Plenary meetings more attractive and launching new discussion groups. *[Ongoing]*
11. Demonstrate and promote the value of EMB membership more actively in order to ensure a sustainable membership and include how this will be done in the EMB Business Plan. Two short documents on the "Value of Membership" (in [2014](#) and [2019](#)) were developed and made available to the members and the wider public on the EMB website. This will be further developed and improved in the future. *[Ongoing]*
12. Increase efforts to demonstrate value for participation and engagement in EMB Working Groups by actively increasing visibility, promoting the outcomes and impact of the outputs of EMB Working Groups. An initial impact overview from EMB's latest publications was published early in 2019 and is available on the [EMB website](#). A specific impact overview for each new publication will also be developed. *[Ongoing, to be published 2 years after publication]*
13. Invest in expanding knowledge on innovative communication, both via the EMBCP and communication experts to stay informed on and apply the most efficient ways to reach EMB's main target audience. *[Ongoing]*
14. Update the EMB web-presence where necessary (e.g. Wikipedia pages). *[September 2019]*
15. Reach out and seek active collaboration with applied science users, capacity building organisations and other relevant international organisations where appropriate. Also work with EMB members to reach out to regional- and national-level organizations. This could be done e.g. by inviting representatives of for instance Regional Sea Conventions to EMB Plenary meetings. *[Ongoing]*
16. Instruct ExCom to set up an internal risk assessment on a regular basis (e.g. annually instead of currently on an ad hoc basis), and make the results available in a comprehensive overview for discussion at Board level. *[Yearly]*
17. Further develop new initiatives such as the [EMB Young Ambassador Programme](#) to reach the group of active young researchers and reinforce their awareness and contributions in EMB activities. An initial evaluation of the Ambassador Programme is foreseen by Spring 2020.